

ELLA CUTLER

1

**JUST SPACES: TOWARDS A  
QUEER METHODOLOGY IN  
VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN**



I would like to acknowledge that this thesis was written on the traditional lands of the Cadigal and Wangal people of the Dharug language. And I wish to pay my respects to elders both past, present, and emerging.

I acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded, and that in my effort to imagine and create safe spaces for the LGBTQI+ community in this thesis, I must also work within my community to decolonise by working towards recognition and treaty, and self-determination that enable safe spaces for Indigenous peoples.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This is a work, that would have never been possible without its participants. So I dedicate this to my participants as thanks for their generosity in contributing, collaborating and participating in this research. Thank you.

A special thank you to my supervisors: Dr Alexandra Crosby and Dr Jacqueline Gothe, for always being generous with their thoughts, conversations and time aiding in developing my voice in this thesis. I also wish to thank Joanne Kinniburgh whose generous suggestions in this work have guided it throughout.

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge the contributions made by my friends, family and my partner throughout this process and their generosity reading, discussing, talking and supporting me through this research.



CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Ella Cutler declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Masters of Design (Research), in the School of Design at the University of Technology, Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise reference or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

Production Note:

**Signature:** Signature removed prior to publication.

**Date:** 12/12/19





## IMAGE TREATMENT

Before I introduce this thesis, I wish to explain the role of images in this document. The images I refer to are ones I have designed, made and scanned in. They are edited versions of fundamental, physical printed matter; they are not transcriptions, rather visual translations.

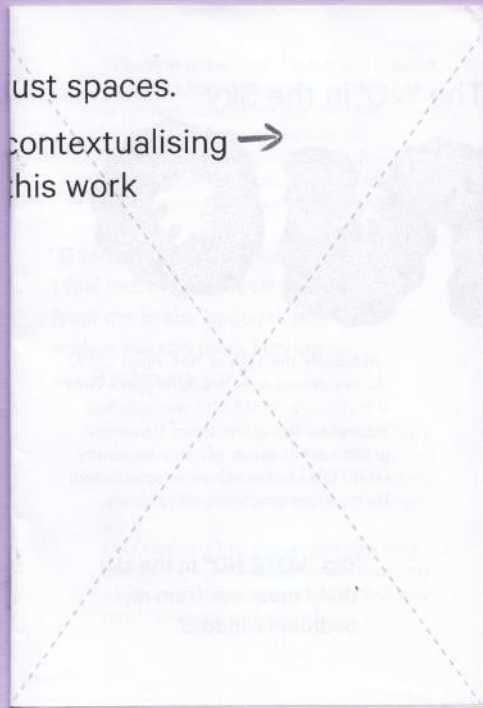
Each image in this thesis is captioned and described in detail as it became clear to me that despite being visually lead research, the images must still be accessible. The captions have therefore been written and designed so that they can be translated through a text reader. The captions are generated through a process of examination, step by step, slowly describing each image so that it can be read, listened to as well as seen. It has been a slow process, as the captions have to make logical sense, as well they must try to retain the voice and power of the represented image. I hope that these captions can help translate the visual into a textual form so they can be engaged with by as many people as possible. Finally, images and their captions have been placed on pale blue backgrounds, in an attempt to reduce the contrast between the text and the page. The choice of a pale coloured background, in combination with 12pt type, hopes to create a more accessible reading experience (Hilderley, 2011).

If this thesis is to pursue a Queer Methodology, the work I make must be accessible; without making accessible work to as many as possible, I cannot call this research Queer or feminist.

# PROLOGUE

2017 was a big year for the LGBTQI+ community in Australia, with the Australian Government implementing a federal plebiscite on granting equal marriage rights. This plebiscite was unexpectedly called, causing great anguish for much of the community. This anguish is reflected in the research and cannot be removed.

Later in my research, it was suggested to write about the context my participants and I were working within. Together we gathered our thoughts and expressed our anguish in a zine that contextualised our experiences in this local landscape as a testament to the discomfort caused by our government's actions. Below is the zine we made and the context of the work:



**Figure 1:** Zine made for the exhibition *Just Spaces* documenting the context of two workshops. Zine designed by Ella Cutler and words by Ella Cutler and participants. Zine's text reads:

### The 'NO' in the Sky



On Sunday the 17th of November 2017, the sky ceased to be a neutral space (was it ever one?). 'VOTE NO' was splashed across the sky of the Inner West, this gesture made much of our community (LGBTQI+) feel unsafe in an area known for its progressive views and politics.

**'Big "VOTE NO" in the sky that I must see from my bedroom window!'**

The sky is not a neutral space and it hasn't been for a long time, due to proliferation of commercial and military use of airspace, however that does not excuse this. The fact that this gesture, which was crowdfunded, only increased the violation it created on my safety and the multiple

**'(I forgot the NO in the sky!!!)  
I feel like I have wiped this  
from my brain, because it  
makes me too mad. Having to  
see it from my yard'**

messages I got from my other LGBTQI+ friends that day. Suddenly the sky was not a neutral zone, the debate was everywhere, not tucked away where I could no longer see it.

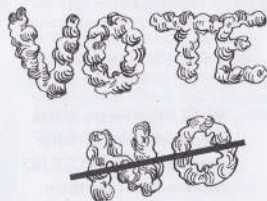
On October 10th, almost a month later, the writing appeared again, this time over Melbourne. I can imagine they felt very much the same way we did.

The anger and pain seeps through here in all our responses. We were hurt. We were made to feel unsafe. Our spaces are not neutral.

**'How to make the sky unsafe: VOTE NO'**

**"VOTE NO" in the sky created a new space in which to feel unsafe. Everywhere the sky should be safe.**

**'In the sky? NO'**



## THE FUCKING NRL MACKLEMORE THING

In retrospect, it seems stupid that out of everything, it was an NRL half-time show that broke me? Like, of all the things! Somehow the lack of seriousness actually made it feel worse. There were plenty of huge, horrible things being said throughout the plebiscite ordeal, but somehow I was able to process them and ignore them. But people getting mad at the idea of Macklemore's 'Same Love' being played at the NRL really was the straw that broke the camel's back. I'm not a fan of Macklemore. Same love is the most milquetoast of gay anthems; it's about gay people, but it's absolutely FOR straight people, and I have no interest in defending it or listening to it. And yet, somehow, I

was in a position where I felt incredibly hurt by criticism of it. The idea that the most banal platitudes towards gayness

**'The fucking NRL Macklemore thing. Just let me love sport in peace. It is my dumb hobby. Stop making it obvious, how much you hate me.'**

would be taken as a threat, a poison, on a sports field was more than I could bear. I'm fully aware of how men's sports have been involved in the propagation and enforcement of homophobia. Yet I thought surely... surely it would be okay to have a

## Stickering of the queer space

On the 28th of September 2018, the door of the UTS Queer Autonomous space was plastered with: 'It's OK to Vote NO' stickers by the Australian Christian Democrats.

**'VOTE NO stickers @ uni. People who would rather poorly vandalise VOTE NO stickers than take them down.'**

While not witness to this event, it still made me feel unsafe. It is important to say here that I don't use the Queer Space, and that the breach of the space's autonomy



did little to affect the way I operate and interact with spaces at UTS. However, I was affected in the way that it reminded me that no space is safe; and for others it must feel the same way.

Autonomous spaces are important to people, and the breaking of that autonomy by hate groups lets the LGBTQI+ community know that that very autonomy is not a given, and that everyone has a part in upholding it.



## TERFs & Nazis

(Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists)

Twitter has been really good for me as a trans woman because of the trans community there. It's given me a community when I was closeted and an outlet I can turn to when I have no-one IRL (In real life).

**'No literal nazis, that should be a given anyway????'**

Unfortunately, Twitter is also full of terfs and nazis. Terf stands for 'trans-exclusionary radical feminist', but don't be fooled by the name into thinking they believe women are anything more than wombs and chromosomes. Terfs are



Literary masthead by feminist icon.

peace offering, a tiny gesture of goodwill. But no. All the bloody Tony Abbots had to come out of the woodwork talking about how terrible an idea it was. Gayness being shoved out of the public eye! What fucking year is it? For people to be so offended at the idea of the most innocent, bland, het-safe iteration of gay being seen in the place of sport was, for some reason, more upsetting that the people talking about how lesbian mothers are incapable of being well-adjusted parents. The latter is something I know people think, subconscious or vocalised, and is something I've grappled with from before the plebiscite and had prepared myself to hear. On the other hand, the idea that gayness is too offensive and evil to be even sung about in the most innocent of terms by a straight man in public was so - so basic and simple, so far back in the

scheme of things I hadn't thought it would even be necessary to protect myself against. I guess that was the running theme throughout the plebiscite. It's not as if I didn't know how most straight people feel about gayness, but I still found myself surprised at the inventiveness and enthusiasm they had for failing to meet the incredibly low standards of treating others with dignity and respect.

**Note:** Almost completely absent from the public debate was the fact that Mary Lambert was going to (and did) accompany Macklemore on stage. She's an openly gay woman! She sang on stage despite all the backlash! She was the one bright, shiny bit of hope amongst it all.

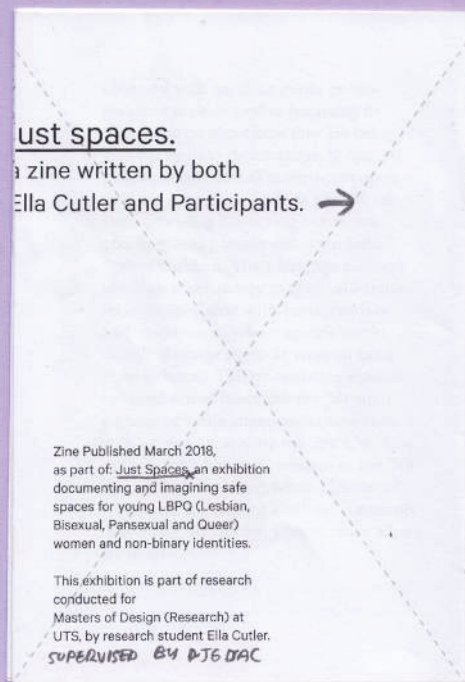
obsessed with us; their entire online presence is dedicated to harassing us. They rattle on about how they are being silenced by us in their fortnightly opinion pieces published in all major newspapers, they get laws passed which prevent us from accessing life-saving healthcare, and they lead harassment campaigns against children. Their feminist political ideology is secondary to their anti-trans fervour; they side with conservatives and reactionaries whose agenda would directly damage them as women (and often lesbians). This co-operation extends to literal actual nazis like the "alt-right", a group of white supremacist neo-nazis with an ever increasing influence, so long as they don't like trans women either. It's bizarre to see self-proclaimed feminists who "fight for women's voices" constantly retweeting fascists but I guess that's where we're at?

Zine's text reads:

The first two spreads are on: The 'NO' in the Sky

On Sunday the 17th of November 2017, the sky ceased to be a neutral space (was it ever one?). 'VOTE NO' was splashed across the sky of the Inner West. This gesture made much of our community (LGBTQI+) feel unsafe in an area known for its progressive views and politics.

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The anger and pain seep through here in all our responses. We were hurt. We were made to feel unsafe. Our spaces are not neutral.

Quotations on the 'NO' in the sky read:

(I forgot the 'NO' in the sky!!!) I feel like I have wiped this from my brain because it makes me too mad. Having to see it from my yard.

Big 'VOTE NO' in the sky that I must see from my bedroom window!

How to make the sky unsafe: VOTE NO

'VOTE NO' in the sky created a new space in which to feel unsafe. Everywhere the sky should be safe.

In the sky?

NO

Illustrated on this spread are two versions of the skywriting made up of clouds. On the first spread, the word 'NO' is illustrated in ink to look like a cloud. On the next spread, a similar illustration is used this time reading 'VOTE NO' which the 'NO' is then slashed out by a straight black line.

The next spread addresses: The Stickering of the Queer Space

On the 28th of September 2018, the door of the UTS Queer Autonomous space was plastered with 'It's OK to Vote NO' stickers by the Australian Christian Democrats.

While not being a witness to this event, it still made me feel unsafe. It is important to say here that I don't use the Queer Space, and that the breach of a space's autonomy did little to affect the way I operate and interact with spaces at UTS. However, I was affected in the way that it reminded me that no space is safe; and for others, it must feel the same way.

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Quotations on The Stickering of the Queer Space read:

VOTE NO stickers @ uni.

People who would rather poorly vandalise VOTE NO stickers than take them down.

Illustration on this spread is a simple door handle with sticker above reading: 'It's OK to Vote NO', this illustration is again painted in ink and shaded with a halftone pattern.

The next spread addresses: The NRL Macklemore controversy

In retrospect, it seems stupid that out of everything, it was an NRL half-time show that broke me? Like, of all the things! Somehow, the lack of seriousness actually made it feel worse. There were plenty of huge, horrible things being said throughout the plebiscite ordeal, but somehow I was able to process them and ignore them. But people getting mad at the idea of Macklemore's 'Same Love' being played at the NRL really was the straw that broke the camel's back. I'm not a fan of Macklemore. Same love is the most milquetoast of gay anthems; it's about gay people, but it's absolutely FOR straight people, and I have no interest in defending it or listening to it. And yet, somehow, I was in a position where I felt incredibly hurt by criticism of it.

The idea that the most banal platitudes towards gayness would be taken as a threat, a poison, on a sports field was more than I could bear. I'm fully aware of how men's sports have been involved in the propagation and enforcement of homophobia. Yet I thought surely... surely it would be okay to have a peace offering, a tiny gesture of goodwill. But no. All the bloody Tony Abbots had to come out of the woodwork talking about how terrible an idea it was. Gayness being shoved out of the public eye! What fucking year is it For people to be so offended at the idea of the most innocent, bland, het-safe iteration of gay being seen in the place of sport was, for some reason, more upsetting that the people talking about how lesbian mothers are incapable of being well-adjusted parents. The latter is something I know people think, subconscious or vocalised, and is something I've grappled with from before the plebiscite and had prepared myself to hear. On the other hand, the idea that gayness is too offensive and evil to be even sung about in the most innocent of terms by a straight man in public was so—so basic and simple, so far back in the scheme of things I hadn't thought it would even be necessary to protect myself against. I guess that was the running theme throughout the plebiscite. It's not as if I didn't know how

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Quotation on The NRL Macklemore controversy reads:

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Next two spreads address: TERFs & Nazis

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Illustration on this spread is a photograph of a hand holding a smartphone, on the screen is a twitter profile. The profile displays a tweet by a fake twitter handle reading: 'We shouldn't have men in women's spaces'. Below is a retweeted

tweet by the same account reading: 'We shouldn't encourage mental illness'. Imposed over this photograph is a hand-drawn arrow pointing to the screen, at the end of this arrow it reads: 'Literal nazi retweet by a feminist icon'.

(Cutler, anonymous, 2018)

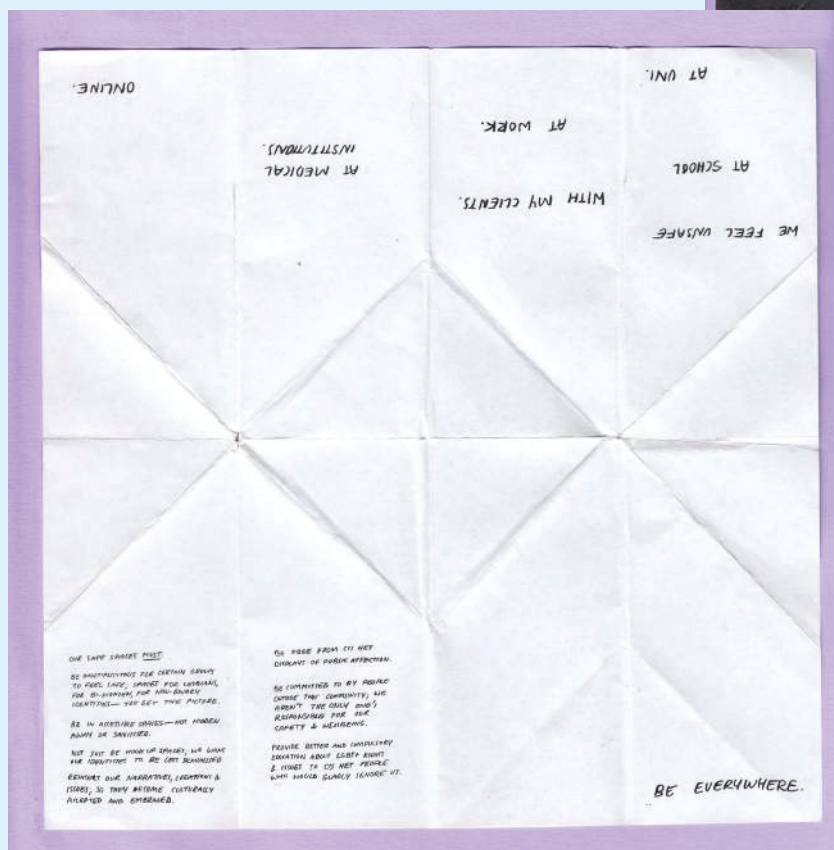
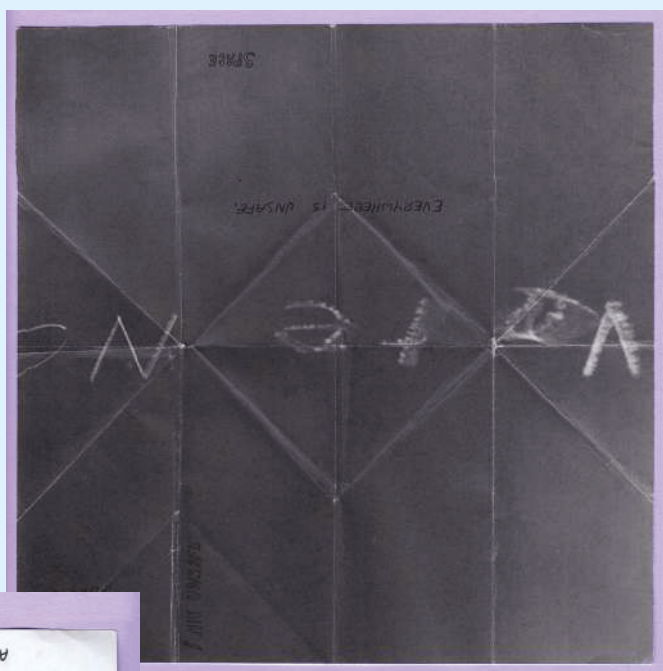


Figure II: Shown when folded into house form (Side One) and two when unfolded. Zine experiment made by the researcher as a potential form of visual translation for the final work Just Spaces. This particular zine documents the 'VOTE NO' skywriting which appeared over Sydney's Inner West in late 2017 (Cutler, 2018).

The context of this federal plebiscite caused something I will call reactive making; during the thick of this context I made another zine.

I am often reactionary and rash in the types of making I may participate in. The zine was made after Workshop One but also after 'VOTE NO' was inscribed in the sky, causing for me and many others a significant breach in the safe spaces we had built. The zine is like a riposte after something hurtful has been said, while considered it lacks critical making skills and thinking, it exists in that moment rather than in reflection. This in-the-momentness removes criticality around how it's communicated. It almost persuades us to VOTE NO, as that is the salient image but also does not communicate the multiple voices of the workshops. The zine was good to make and was essential in introducing a criticality as well as an awareness of how context affects the way we work and think. For (Queer) critical making and methods to emerge, we must slow down, show sensitivity and gentleness and examine an experience that exists in a singular moment and make from there.

# INDEX

|  |    |
|--|----|
| IMAGE TREATMENT  | 9  |
| PROLOGUE   | 10 |
| LIST OF FIGURES  | 22 |
| INTRODUCTION   | 28 |
| 0.1 THESIS INTENTION   | 30 |
| 0.2 TERMS: SPACE AND QUEER DISCOMFORT                            | 37 |
| 0.3 THESIS OVERVIEW  | 39 |
| CHAPTER ONE  | 42 |
| 1.1 INTRODUCTION   | 43 |
| 1.2 BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS: INTRODUCTION<br>TO THE CORE THEORY | 44 |
| 1.3 COLLABORATION  | 49 |
| 1.31 CRITICAL RESEARCH PRACTICE AS PART OF COLLABORATION         | 51 |
| 1.4 INTERDISCIPLINARY CONVERSATIONS                              | 52 |
| 1.5 CHAPTER CONCLUSION   | 62 |
| CHAPTER TWO  | 64 |
| 2.1 INTRODUCTION   | 65 |
| 2.2 SITUATING THE INTENTION OF THE RESEARCH                      | 66 |
| 2.3 ETHICS   | 67 |
| 2.4 WORKSHOP ONE   | 71 |
| 2.41 INTENTION   | 71 |
| 2.42 METHOD  | 71 |
| 2.43 FINDINGS AND INSIGHT  | 78 |
| 2.5 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WORKSHOP ONE AND TWO                     | 81 |
| 2.51 TIME AS A DIMENSION BETWEEN WORKSHOPS                       | 84 |
| 2.6 WORKSHOP TWO   | 84 |
| 2.61 INTENTION   | 84 |
| 2.62 METHOD  | 85 |
| 2.63 FINDINGS AND INSIGHT  | 89 |

|                |  |     |
|----------------|--|-----|
| 2.7            | FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE FRAMEWORK                            | 93  |
| 2.8            | CONCLUSION   | 94  |
| CHAPTER THREE  |  | 96  |
| 3.1            | INTRODUCTION   | 97  |
| 3.2            | TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION                                    | 98  |
| 3.3            | OVERALL AIMS OF THE VISUAL TRANSLATIONS                          | 101 |
| 3.4            | MATERIALISING DESIGN RESEARCH THROUGH ZINE-MAKING                | 102 |
| 3.41           | RISOGRAPH PRINTING   | 109 |
| 3.42           | PAPER CHOICE AND PIECING IT TOGETHER                             | 110 |
| 3.5            | DESIGNING THROUGH AVATARS TOWARDS A VISUAL<br>TRANSLATION METHOD | 114 |
| 3.6            | EXPERIMENTATION  | 118 |
| 3.61           | THE FIRST VISUAL TRANSLATION                                     | 118 |
| 3.62           | THE SECOND VISUAL TRANSLATION: PAPER HOUSES                      | 119 |
| 3.7            | JUST SPACES  | 122 |
| 3.71           | A QUEER METHODOLOGY IN JUST SPACES                               | 127 |
| 3.72           | MAKING UNDERSTANDING & INSIGHTS IN JUST SPACES                   | 156 |
| 3.8            | CHAPTER CONCLUSION   | 158 |
| CONCLUSION     |  | 148 |
| REFERENCE LIST |  | 165 |
| APPENDIX A     |  | 171 |

# FIGURE LIST

## PROLOGUE

**Figure I:** Zine made for the exhibition *Just Spaces* documenting the context of two workshops. (Cutler, anonymous, 2018)

**Figure II:** Zine experiment made by the researcher as a potential form of visual translation for the final work *Just Spaces*. (Cutler, 2018)

## INTRODUCTION

**Figure 0.1:** Excerpt from the zine: I would want to know if you were Queer. (Cutler, 2017)

**Figure 0.2:** A question matrix for working towards a Queer research Methodology (Cutler, 2018)

## CHAPTER ONE

**Figure 1.1:** Keg de Souza: *Common Knowledge and Learning Curves* (2018) (Artspace, 2018)

**Figure 1.2:** Tessa Zettel and Susie Nelson: *An Illustrated Compendium of Notes on Preserving Food + Futures in an Age of Unsettlement*, 2017, published by Cloudship press. (Zettel, Nelson, 2017)

**Figure 1.3:** Sarah Rodigari's *Queer UTS*, an interactive and collaborative tour given to members of the public by the artist and UTS's Queer Collective. (Rodigari, 2017)

## CHAPTER TWO

**Figure 2.1:** Diagram of workshop flow and structure, explaining the workshop structure. (Cutler, 2017)

**Figure 2.2:** Diagram matrix given to the participant facilitator to help guide questions and conversation. (Cutler, 2017)

**Figure 2.3:** Diagram documenting a proposed system of maintenance of safe spaces. This diagram was initially designed by participants in Workshop One and then redesigned by myself. (Cutler, 2018)

**Figure 2.4:** Excerpt of a zine made for Workshop Two, made to make explicit the thoughts and insights gained from listening in Workshop One. This zine was gifted to participants as a mode of thanks. (Cutler, 2018)

**Figure 2.5:** Excerpt from the same zine shown in 2.3 this time with the instructions given to participants for Workshop Two to allow ‘Thinking, Imagining, Writing, Drawing Safe Spaces.’ (Cutler, 2018)

## CHAPTER THREE

**Figure 3.1:** Figure 3.1: Zine documenting reflections made of both workshops but also the in-between periods of reflection. (Cutler, 2018)

**Figure 3.2:** Excerpt from the zine: ‘*This is not another photo of a gay cisgender white man.*’ A zine written by Be Oakley and published by GenderFail press, 2018. (Oakley, 2018)

**Figure 3.3:** London Risograph studio: Hato’s printing guide

(Hato Press, 2015)

Figure 3.4: Quilted sheets of paper, shot on 35mm film. (Cutler, 2017)

**Figure 3.5:** HIV AIDS Memorial Quilt Project, image from the exhibition of the Quilt at Washington Mall in 2012. (Malet, 2012)

**Figure 3.6:** Dungeons and Dragons current Character sheet. (Butor, 2017)

**Figure 3.7:** Character sheet made to translate and create personas. (Cutler, 2018)

**Figure 3.8:** Photographs of an early experiment, hand drawing and tracing the type of one of the original documents on tracing paper. (Phan, 2019)

**Figure 3.9:** A paper house experiment. (Phan, 2019)

**Figure 3.10:** Photographs taken of the exhibition *Just Spaces* (Cutler, 2018) and (Glasby, 2018).

**Figure 3.11:** Designerly movements and qualities of action for a critical practice in visual communication, conceptualised and designed by Jacqueline Gothe. (Gothe, 2015 p.88)

**Figure 3.12:** The six final translations for *Just Spaces*





# ABSTRACT

JUST SPACES: TOWARDS A QUEER METHODOLOGY IN  
VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN

This project presents a Queer Methodology by imagining and designing safe spaces. It argues for the reorientation of design research by exploring gentle, sensitive, slow and non-repeatable methods in Queer visual communication design. This exploration takes place in two ways; firstly through the design of two collaborative workshops, and secondly the subsequent visual translation of those workshops. The methods outlined by this Queer Methodology seek to challenge heteronormative practices in design research. Challenging these practices and norms is not 'about assimilation or resistance, but about inhabiting norms differently' (Ahmed, 2004 p. 155). It requires imagination, creativity and optimism. This Queer Methodology seeks to establish 'Queer' modes of translating, making, sharing, designing and distributing that can be applied to the complex navigation of Queer and non-Queer spaces. The resulting exhibition 'Just Spaces' explores the potential of a Queer Methodology in visual communication design.

**KEYWORDS:**

Visual communication design, Queer Methodologies, safe spaces, participatory design, zines, visual translation.

Ahmed, S. 2004, '*Queer Feelings*', The Cultural Politics of Emotion, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh